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Washington, DC – Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA) introduced today bi-partisan legislation that protects uninsured veterans from being saddled with hospital bills for emergency care received at non-Veterans Affairs hospitals.

Currently, when the nearest VA hospital is full, veterans who need emergency care spill over to non-VA facilities. However, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs only covers the initial emergency cost at facilities outside its system. If a veteran has to remain at that hospital, because the local VA facility is full, he or she is responsible for the bill.

"The horrible result is uninsured veterans with stratospheric insurance bills," Honda said. "A person without insurance normally is not in the best financial situation, so this crack in the system only adds to the burden these brave men and women have to carry. We must treat our veterans with the respect they deserve, and this small change to an existing law will save veterans a great deal of grief."

The bill amends the Millennium Health Care Act, which has left many veterans in a no man's land when this unintended situation occurs. The problem is likely to grow as veteran ranks swell with service men and women returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Robert Dahlberg, a Vietnam veteran, noticed this situation two years ago after he was involved in a helicopter crash while fighting a fire in Northern California. Dahlberg, a constituent in Honda's district, went to register with the VA to help pay for physical therapy. Dahlberg of San Jose, asked more questions than usual and learned about the kink in the Millennium Health Care Act.

"Then I heard the words '...and then you will need to get yourself, once stabilized, to a VA hospital.' These words alarmed me. So even if I had a heart attack and was stabilized at a non-VA hospital it was my responsibility to get myself to a VA hospital?" said Dahlberg, who contacted Honda's office about the issue. "This requirement to get oneself to a VA hospital after stabilization is at best a joke. It could leave veterans of all ages financially destitute with a huge bill from the non-VA hospital. This is unconscionable."

This important provision is strongly supported by veteran's service organizations such as the American Legion and AMVETS because it corrects the unintended crack in the Millennium Health Care Act.

The bill is cosponsored by: Rep. John Hall (D-NY), Rep. Donna Christensen (D-VI), Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN), Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA), Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL), Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA), and Rep. John Conyers (D-MI).